

Effects of Framing and Timing of Realistic Job Previews

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

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May 2016

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Alexandra Luong, for all of her hard work, honesty, and for providing the motivation I needed to complete this project. Without your advice and guidance, completion of this project would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank the core I/O professors at UMD: Dr. Alexandra Luong, Dr. Chris Lake, and Dr. Julie Slowiak for all of their dedication to their classes and students. All of your high expectations pushed me to succeed.

Further, I would like to thank my committee members: Dr. Alexandra Luong, Dr. Chris Lake, Dr. Aydin Durgunoglu, and Dr. Ryan Goei. Without your advice and guidance, my project would not be what it is today.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, friends, cohort, and significant other for all of their support, honesty, and friendship throughout my graduate education. You all helped keep me grounded and make decisions when I needed guidance.

Abstract

This study examined the effects of message framing and timing of the message delivery in the hiring process. Framing of the realistic job preview (RJP) message to participants was manipulated to randomly assign them to receive a positively-framed RJP or a negatively-framed RJP. Timing of the RJP delivery was randomly assigned by having participants imagine they either received the RJP right after submitting an application (“early”) or after several selection hurdles have been completed (“late”). Participants were then asked to complete an electronic survey that measured their intent to proceed in the hiring process, applicant expectations, and feeling of informational justice. A need for cognition measure was also included for analysis as a potential covariate. Several theoretical and practical implications are also discussed.

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Effects of Framing and Timing of Realistic Job Previews

In recent decades, organizations have become global entities with a vast range of jobs that are becoming increasingly complex and less well-developed (Buckley et al., 2002). Subsequently, employers must expend more effort in their recruitment processes in order to ensure that information communicated to applicants about the job and organization is clear. As noted by Gatewood, Gowan, and Lautenschlager (1993), applicants engage in a “job-choice process” when deciding what jobs or organizations to pursue. Having clear information about a job and organization enables individuals to engage in self-selection as well as enhance their fit with the job and organization.

Defined by Premack and Wanous (1985) as the “tendency for a job candidate to withdraw from the selection process prior to beginning work,” self-selection increases the chances of an applicant choosing a job that will enhance his/her person-organization fit. Person-organization fit is a multifaceted concept that has been defined by Kristof (1996) as a match between a person and an organization in terms of shared similar fundamental characteristics and needs of both the applicant and organization being met. Therefore, according to Greguras and Diefendorff (2009), if employees feel they will have a poor person-organization fit, attempts will be made to either increase the feeling of fit, or the employee will leave the environment (i.e., quit their job). Enhancing fit via self-selection would reduce the resources that would have to be spent on an employee.

To enhance self-selection and allow applicants to determine their perceived fit with the job and organization, employers may send out “signals” which would reveal characteristics about the job and organization (Celani & Singh, 2011). According to

signaling theory, job applicants make job choices based on imperfect information that can lead to “signals of unobservable organization characteristics” (Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991). For example, a study by Avery (2003) showed that organizations which displayed racial diversity in recruitment ads were perceived to be more attractive by black applicants, possibly due to a signal of the organization’s commitment to diversity.

When attempting to attract applicants, employers often emphasize the positive “signals” while downplaying any negative aspects of the job or organization (Buda & Charnov, 2003). This tendency is particularly prevalent when there is a tight labor market and employers are competing for the more desirable applicants. However, sending only positive signals may result in over-inflated applicant expectations of the job and organization, decrease the possibility of self-selection, and increase the possibility of inaccurate judgments of fit (Buda & Charnov, 2003). Indeed, a significant body of scientific research (e.g., Buda & Charnov, 2003; Reeve, Highhouse, & Brooks, 2006; Slaughter & Highhouse, 2003; Wanous, 1973) suggests that it would actually benefit the organization and the applicant if both positive *and* negative information about a job and organization are conveyed to applicants during the recruitment process through the use of realistic job previews.

Realistic Job Previews

Coined “realistic job preview” (RJP) by Wanous (1973), the presentation of both positive and negative (i.e., realistic) aspects of the job and organization can take various forms and may include a variety of information. For example, employers such as the Home Depot, PetSmart, and Sears deliver RJP in video formats to distribute information

about their respective companies to applicants. Informal RJPs can also be derived by the applicant from testimonials on employment websites such as Glassdoor and Indeed.

Popovich and Wanous (1982) further defined RJPs as “persuasive communication” designed to influence attitudes about the job and the organization. Following the Yale Persuasive Communication Model, the researchers proposed the focus of RJPs not only be on the “message sent”, but also on the “message received.”

Breaugh and Billings (1998) outlined the five key elements of RJPs and their importance for research and practice. These elements include accuracy, specificity, breadth, credibility, and importance. Accuracy was meant to convey the “correctness” of the RJP content compared to the reality of the job, while specificity was defined as information detailed enough for a job applicant to make an informed decision. Breadth was meant to include information that covered a broad range of topics about a job that could include essential job tasks, coworker and supervisor characteristics, recognition and promotion procedures, and the general affect of the work environment. Credibility refers to how believable the RJP is to the applicant. RJPs are believed by the researchers to be “important” if they contain information the applicant lacks about the job and/or organization.

RJP Outcomes and Met Expectations

Past research suggests the use of RJPs may result in increased initial job satisfaction, organizational commitment, decreased turnover intentions, and increased job performance (Buda & Charnov, 2003; Phillips, 1998; Premack & Wanous, 1985).

Although several models exist for explaining these outcomes, the role of met

expectations has been most widely cited (Breaugh & Starke, 2003). As first proposed by Porter & Steers (1973), the concept of met expectations refers to the “discrepancy between what a person encounters on [the] job in terms of positive and negative experiences and what he expected to encounter.” RJPs work to reduce the discrepancy between a job seeker’s potentially unrealistic expectations of a job and the reality of that job (Premack & Wanous, 1985).

In summary, RJPs can play a vital role in the recruitment process for job seekers and organizations. When applicants are presented with a RJP, their expectations are brought to a level of reality, which results in less chance of a “reality shock.” RJPs also allow applicants to determine person-environment fit and engage in self-selection, saving the organization resources. However, review of past literature fails to provide a clear standard of *how* or *when* to present a RJP (Phillips, 1998). Therefore, this project will focus on how RJP information is framed and when it is presented to applicants. Below I present the theoretical background of my research questions and related hypotheses.

Framing of RJPs

Prospect theory (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981) proposes that how information is framed may affect decisions, even when the outcomes are equivalent. In classic studies, participants were told the U.S. was preparing for an outbreak of an Asian disease that would result in the death of 600 people. Participants were asked to choose between two programs. Program A, stated as saving 200 people, was chosen by 72% of participants over Program B, which stated a one-third probability of saving 600 people and a two-thirds probability of saving no one. However, when the scenario was presented to a

second group of participants with the programs negatively framed, the results were reversed. Program D (equivalent to program B, with a stated a one-third probability nobody would die), was preferred by 78% of participants as opposed to Program C (equivalent to program A, which stated 400 people would die).

One essential feature of prospect theory is that people are risk-avoidant when faced with a choice framed with “gains” (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984), which can be exemplified with the classic gambling scenario. The gambling scenario demonstrates risk-aversion when people are given an 85% chance to win \$1000 (equivalent to a 15% chance to win nothing), or a 100% certainty to get \$800. Even though the 85% chance to win \$1000 is the higher mathematical expectation ($.85 \times \$1000 + .15 \times \$0 = \$850$), people almost always prefer the sure money. Prospect theory also suggests people are risk-prone when faced with a choice framed with “losses”, as exemplified in the forced choice scenario (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). If a person is forced to choose between an 85% chance of *losing* \$1000 (equivalent to a 15% chance to lose nothing) or a 100% certain loss of \$800, most will choose to take the gamble to lose nothing. The same mathematical expectation occurs here, but in its reciprocal – the gamble has a stronger negative effect ($-\$850$) than the certain loss ($-\$800$). Prospect theory has a second major feature in that people generally have a stronger reaction to losses rather than gains (i.e., risk-aversion) (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). In alignment with prospect theory and classic studies finding support that the most positively framed choice is chosen by a majority of participants, my first hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1: Participants who are presented with a positively framed RJP will report higher intentions to proceed in the recruitment process, as compared to those presented with a negatively framed RJP.

In a 2003 study, Buda and Charnov drew from prospect theory to examine message processing in RJP. Processing can be influenced by positively or negatively framing content. In Buda and Charnov's study (2003), positively framed RJP contained messages that emphasized a job's advantages and its potential gains to the applicant; negatively framed RJP presented messages that described potential losses to applicants. The condition with a positively framed RJP posited that "85% of current employees were satisfied with their job and the organization"; the condition with negatively framed RJP stated that 15% of current employees were "dissatisfied with the job and organization." Buda and Charnov (2003) found that individuals who received a negatively framed RJP had significantly lower expectations than those who received a positively framed RJP. As implied in the met expectations model, there are benefits to RJP in that they decrease the discrepancy between what applicants expect to encounter and what they actually do encounter as an employee (Porter & Steers, 1973). By *negatively* framing RJP, I may be able to further decrease expectations, with the hope of increasing longer-term outcomes such as job satisfaction, retention, and performance. Therefore, my second hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: Participants who are presented a negatively framed RJP will report lower expectations of a job, as opposed to those presented with a positively framed RJP.

Although important implications can be drawn from Buda and Charnov's study, some limitations exist. First, participants were not necessarily job seekers, with the average age of 19.1 years old (i.e., college freshman and sophomores). The researchers also manipulated only one piece of information in the RJP, namely job satisfaction. In this project, I will expand on the Buda and Charnov study by including actual job seekers in the sample. Additionally, I will include a variety of job aspects in the RJP to determine the influences framing may have on a job seeker's reactions and intentions.

Timing of RJP

In addition to examining the outcomes of framing RJP, I have also examined the timing of RJP information. In a 1998 meta-analysis, Phillips proposes that applicants attend less to job specific information early in their job search process and more so during later in the process (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Phillips, 1994); subsequently, effects of RJP are greater when presented in the late recruitment stages. Although the researcher found moderating effects of timing RJP on various outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, attrition, and performance), the relationships were fairly inconsistent.

Given the inconsistent findings in regard to timing in the RJP research literature, I am drawing from the literature on judgment and decision-making to formulate my next hypothesis. The sunk cost effect refers to the phenomenon in which individuals have a stronger tendency to continue in a process once they have invested resources (Arkes & Blummer, 1985; Brunine de Bruin, Strough, & Parker, 2014). If the individual were to concede in his/her efforts, the investment of any resources will viewed as being "wasted"

(Brunine de Bruin, Strough, & Parker, 2014); therefore, the investment of resources is the motivator to continue in the process even if continued efforts are failing. With the assumption that an applicant has invested more resources in the later stages of recruitment, I expect that presenting RJPs later in the process would produce a feeling of “sunk cost” such that individuals are less likely to withdraw from the process:

Hypothesis 3: Participants who are presented with an RJP as the last step of the recruitment process will report greater intent to proceed in the recruitment process, than those who are presented with an RJP earlier in the process.

Perceived fairness in timing of RJP. In addition to examining intentions to proceed in the recruitment process, I was also interested in how timing affects applicants’ perceptions of fairness in the RJP. There are three major components in organizational justice. Distributive justice refers to perceived fairness in outcomes; procedural justice refers to perceived fairness in decision-making; and interactional justice refers to perceived fairness in treatment (Greenberg, 1993). Interactional justice itself comprises of two sub-categories (Greenberg, 2006): interpersonal and informational. Of relevance to RJPs is informational justice as this refers to the accuracy and completeness of information (Greenberg, 1993) and the timeliness of such information (Shapiro, Buttner & Barry, 1994). To the extent that providing RJPs earlier in the recruitment process conveys to applicants greater completeness and more timely information, I predict:

Hypothesis 4: Participants who are delivered the RJP in the early stage of the recruitment process will report increased perceived fairness of the recruitment

process, as opposed to those who receive the RJP in the late stage of the recruitment process.

Need for Cognition as a Moderator

With the exception of a few studies (e.g., Buda & Charnov, 2003; Reeve, Highhouse, & Brooks, 2006), little research has examined how individual differences may affect how RJP content is processed and perceived. Reeve et al. (2006) examined positive/negative affect as a moderator to RJP. Their results suggest that job seekers' general perception of a company are largely based on affective response to RJP content. The more content there is in the RJP that can influence an individual's positive or negative affective response, the stronger the applicant reactions will be (Reeve, Highhouse, & Brooks, 2006). Buda and Charnov (2003) examined need for cognition as an individual differences moderator in relation to RJP. In this project, I will focus on the individual difference of need for cognition as a possible moderator.

Need for cognition has been described as a person's likelihood of engaging in and enjoying tasks that require cognitive effort (e.g., thinking, introspection, troubleshooting, etc.) (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984). Those with a high need for cognition are more likely to make sense of their environment through seeking, finding, and reflecting on information; opposed to those with a low need for cognition who are more likely to get their information from others, "common sense", or social comparison (Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996). Need for cognition has the ability to moderate RJP effectiveness as shown in Buda and Charnov's (2003) study; those low in need for cognition typically were more strongly influenced by a negatively framed RJP. Past

research completed by Smith and Petty (1996) found possible support for this concept. Their research presented support that negatively framed messages were more carefully scrutinized by participants, which influenced subsequent attitudes about the message topic (Smith & Petty, 1996). Aligned with Buda and Charnov's and Smith and Petty's past research, my fifth hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 5: Need for cognition (NC) moderates the effect of framing, such that those low in NC (as compared to those high in NC) will report higher intentions to proceed when RJP is positively framed and lower job expectations when RJP is negatively framed.

Method

Design and Procedure

This study followed a 2 (framing of RJP: positively framed RJP or negatively framed RJP) x 2 (timing of RJP presentation: immediately after application is submitted or after completing several steps in the recruitment process before a job offer has been made) between-subjects factorial design. All stimulus material and measures were administered through an online Qualtrics survey. The survey was e-mailed to potential participants that fit the demographic profile (i.e., juniors, seniors, graduate students, and alumni) with the assistance of the University of Minnesota Duluth's Career and Internship Services Office and Office of Student Life. Two weeks after the survey was sent out initially to potential participants, a reminder e-mail was sent to the same sample pools.

All participants were presented a job description for a “generic” job in the business field (i.e., Consultant) at a fictional organization (see Appendix A for the job description). Participants were then randomly assigned to one of the two framing conditions and one of two timing conditions, or the control condition (see Appendices B, C, and D for RJP examples). After reading through the job description and RJP, participants were tasked with completing measures to assess the dependent variables, which include: (1) intent to proceed in the recruitment process, (2) expectations of the job, and (3) perceived fairness to the recruitment process. After completing all survey material, all participants were able to voluntarily submit an e-mail address for a chance at compensation. Compensation included the first 240 participants receiving an electronic \$5.00 gift card to Amazon.com.

Participants

Participants were alumni, graduate students, “junior”, or “senior” undergraduate students (i.e., 3 or more years in college) from the north Midwest region of the United States. Before data cleaning equaled, $N = 1,093$. Data cleaning included: filtering out non-completed surveys, removing underclassmen (18 freshman and 106 sophomores) and potentially automated or false responses as marked by extremely short completion times and public domain e-mail addresses (494 participants). Due to the extent of incomplete surveys and possible false data being submitted to the researcher, the drop-out rate for this study was unusually high at 56.5%. Only 43.5% of surveys submitted to the researcher had usable data.

The total sample after data cleaning was $N = 475$ (205, 43.2% male; 263, 55.4% female), all age 18 or older. Most participants identified as “Caucasian/white” ($N = 404$, 85.1%). Of those, 187 participants subscribed to a university’s job search database, while 288 belonged to the general student body. Since both sample pools contained identical demographic parameters in the data collection phase, namely year in college being “junior” or above, both samples will be analyzed simultaneously. As such, college “seniors” made up the majority of participants ($N = 245$, 51.6%), followed by “juniors” ($N = 177$, 37.3%). Participants employment status at the time of data collection indicates the majority of participants were employed part-time ($N = 292$, 61.5%), while only 67 (14.1%) were employed full-time, and 116 (24.4%) were not employed. Participants were also asked which industry/industries they were employed in or planned on applying to from a list of ten choices. The majority of participants indicated “Management/business/finance” as the most popular field ($N = 134$, 28.2%).

Measures

Intent to proceed in the recruitment process was measured using semantic differential five-point scales adapted from Buda and Charnov (2003) that include the items: unlikely/likely; improbable/probable; impossible/possible.

Job expectations were measured using semantic differential five-point scales adapted from Buda and Charnov (2003) with items: bad/good; low/high; and unsuccessful/successful. In Buda and Charnov’s (2003) study, the researchers combined the differential scale items used to measure “attractiveness of the job” (not used in the current research), “willingness to accept a job offer”, and “expectations about the job”

into one dependent variable named “job attitudes”, which intercorrelated at $r = .87, p < .05$.

Perceived fairness was measured using five five-point Likert scale items from Colquitt (2001). All five items in this scale follow anchors of 1 = to a small extent to 5 = to a large extent. Colquitt reported reliability for these items from both a university sample ($\alpha = .79$) and field sample ($\alpha = .90$). Following Colquitt's (2001) informational justice scale, these items will appear in this study after following the prompt “The following items refer to Metric. To what extent..” Items focus on candid communication (i.e., “Has Metric been candid in their communications with you?”), thorough procedure explanation (i.e., “Has Metric explained the procedures thoroughly?”), reasonable explanations, timely communication, and tailoring communication to individuals’ specific needs.

Other measures include the short form of the Need for Cognition Scale (NCS) taken from Cacioppo, Petty, and Kao (1984); and a demographics questionnaire. The 18-item NCS was developed from Cacioppo and Petty’s original 34-item NCS. Participants responses on the short form showed significant correlation to participant responses on the long form ($r = 0.95, p < .001$). Need for cognition was analyzed using a median-split to create a dichotomous covariate to determine the outcome for hypothesis 5. The original study in which the NCS short-form was developed was designed to apply this dichotomy of “low need for cognition” (i.e., those below the median) or “high need for cognition” (i.e., those above the median). Another study that has utilized the NCS short-form also followed this design (Areni, Ferrell, & Wilcox, 1999). In alignment with past research,

need for cognition was analyzed using a median-split analysis. Need for cognition was analyzed as a covariate due to its nature as a moderator variable in the current research. Being that need for cognition data were only collected for this purpose, thus not manipulated by the researcher, it was analyzed as a moderating covariate. To ensure participants read the presented RJP, participants will be asked to respond to several manipulation check items pertaining to their recall of RJP content.

IBM SPSS was utilized to run all analyses. Descriptive statistics were performed to determine the demographic attributes of the sample. A reliability analysis was performed to determine Cronbach's alpha level of each scale used in measuring the dependent variables. A MANOVA was conducted to determine the main effects for Hypotheses 1-4, while a MANCOVA was conducted to analyze the data for interaction effects for Hypothesis 5. Further, Hypothesis 5 was analyzed using two MANCOVA analyses; the first with NC as a continuous variable (i.e., raw scores of participants across both low and high conditions), the second with NC as a dichotomous, dummy-coded variable aligning with past research. Hypothesis 5 was analyzed with NC as a continuous variable first in attempt to gain a sense of "baseline" for the moderation effect.

Results

Initial Analyses

Reliability levels were measured using Cronbach's alpha for all measures used in this study. As shown in Table 1, all measures had high levels of internal consistency. Participants were randomly selected for each of the five possible conditions: neutral ($N = 91$), positive framing/early timing ($N = 103$), positive framing/late timing ($N = 95$),

negative framing/early timing ($N = 90$), or negative framing/late timing ($N = 96$). Two manipulation check items were utilized in this study. The first focused on the timing manipulation and asked participants to report when Metric contacted them. As shown by the results in Table 2, the majority of participants answered correctly in all conditions.

Table 1.

Reliability Analysis Statistics of all Dependent Variable Scales

Scale	Cronbach's alpha
Intent to proceed	.889
Applicant expectations	.873
Informational justice	.796
Need for cognition	.871

Table 2.

Manipulation Check 1 Response Frequencies and Percentage Correct

	Neutral	Early	Late
Immediately	54	130	53
Hurdles	23	43	116
Never	14	20	21
Percentage Correct		67.3%	61.1%

**Note.* Manipulation Check 1 read: "Based on the information you received about Metric and the position being applied for, when did Metric e-mail you?"

The second manipulation check focused on the framing manipulation and asked participants to report the satisfaction level of Metric employees and clients. The majority of participants in the positive conditions answered correctly, while the opposite is true of the negative condition as shown in Table 3.

Table 3.

Manipulation Check 2 Response Frequencies and Percentage Correct

	Neutral	Positive	Negative
Low	19	29	76
High	32	134	70
Unsure	40	35	39
Percentage Correct		67.7%	41.1%

**Note.* Item text read: “Based on the information you received about Metric and the position being applied for, how would you rate employee and client satisfaction?”

Hypothesis Testing

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to analyze main effects in this study. Results show further support for the framing condition present in past literature. Hypothesis 1, which stated that a positively framed RJP will result in a higher intent to proceed, was supported. The between-subjects effect examining the independent variable, framing, on the intent to proceed dependent variable was statistically significant $F(1, 473) = 16.209, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .035$. A complete table of statistics for between-subjects effects can be seen in Table 4. Mean differences with 95% confidence intervals [LL, UL] for all hypotheses are displayed in Table 5. Bonferroni post-hoc testing results

showed that the positive condition did significantly differ from the negative condition in regard to intent to proceed, but not from the neutral condition. Hypothesis 2 was also supported. The between-subjects effect of negatively framing the RJP resulted in statistically significant lowered job expectations, $F(1, 463) = 22.007, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .072$. Bonferroni post-hoc tests were used again to confirm that the positive and negative condition significantly differ from each other in regard to applicant expectations, but the neutral condition showed no difference. However, results from this study fail to support hypotheses related to timing of the RJP.

Table 4.

Between-Subjects Effects Statistics

IV	DV	SS	df	F	p	η_p^2
Framing	Intent to Proceed	15.818	1	16.209	.000	.035
	Applicant Expectations	22.007	1	34.867	.000	.072
	Informational Justice	3.145	1	4.287	.039	.009
Timing	Intent to Proceed	.007	1	.007	.933	.000
	Applicant Expectations	.238	1	.377	.539	.001
	Informational Justice	1.109	1	1.512	.219	.003
Framing *	Intent to Proceed	.853	1	.874	.350	.002
Timing	Applicant Expectations	.170	1	.269	.604	.001
	Informational Justice	.024	1	.033	.855	.000

Note. ^a Computed using alpha = .05

Hypothesis 3, which stated receiving the RJP “after several selection hurdles” had no statistically significant effect, $F(1, 473) = .007, p = .933, \eta_p^2 < .001$, on intent to proceed. Hypothesis 4 was also not supported; receiving the RJP “immediately after

submitting your application” had no statistically significant effect, $F(1, 466) = 1.512, p = .219, \eta_p^2 = .003$, on informational justice.

Two multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) were conducted to test Hypothesis 5, which stated need for cognition (NC) moderates the effect of framing, such that those low in NC (as compared to those high in NC) will report higher intentions to proceed when RJP is positively framed and lower job expectations when RJP is negatively framed. The first MANCOVA analyzed applied NC as a continuous variable to gain a sense of baseline of the moderation effect. Need for cognition had a significant moderation effect in this first MANCOVA on intent to proceed in the hiring process, $F(1, 438) = 33.673, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .072$. Need for cognition also had a significant moderation effect for applicant expectations, $F(1, 438) = 12.462, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .028$. For both of these results, SPSS applied NC with a value of 3.5828; the median for NC equals 3.5556 and the mean of all NC scores equals 3.5676.

The second MANCOVA applied NC as a dummy-coded, dichotomous variable, following previous literature. In alignment with Hypothesis 5, the following results will focus only on the low NC group. Need for cognition was applied in SPSS with a value of 3.0414, which is below the calculated mean and median. Results from the second MANCOVA analysis show that NC is not a significant moderator for either intent to proceed ($F(1, 485) = 1.505, p = .221, \eta_p^2 = .006$), or applicant expectations ($F(1, 485) = 2.325, p = .129, \eta_p^2 = .009$). Thus, hypothesis 5 was not supported.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

This study examined the effects of framing and timing of realistic job previews on several variables: intent to proceed, applicant expectations, and perceived informational justice. Given the previous literature on RJPs, findings regarding Hypothesis 1 support Prospect Theory. Recall that the final outcome of the framing variable was identical in the positive and negative conditions. However, the positive condition resulted in a stronger intent to proceed effect versus the negatively framed condition – similar to Tversky and Kahneman’s original study from 1981. Hypothesis 2 was also supported in this study. Given the previous literature on RJPs, this was also not an unexpected result. The Met Expectations Model lends support to the results in that job expectations were lower in the negatively framed condition, versus the positively framed condition.

Hypothesis 3 however, was not supported. Participants who were presented the RJP as the last step in the hiring process did not show a greater intent to proceed. Contrary to the sunk-cost effect, receiving the RJP late in the hiring process, thus investing more time, effort, and commitment into said hiring process, presumably did not sway participants’ feelings of “wasting” these resources. One possible explanation for this could be the excitement or desperation of applicants making it far into the process. Recall participants in this study were believed to be college-aged, active job seekers who were presumably entering their first career-oriented job. Participants could have been “blinded” by their emotions at accepting their first job offer out of college.

Table 5.

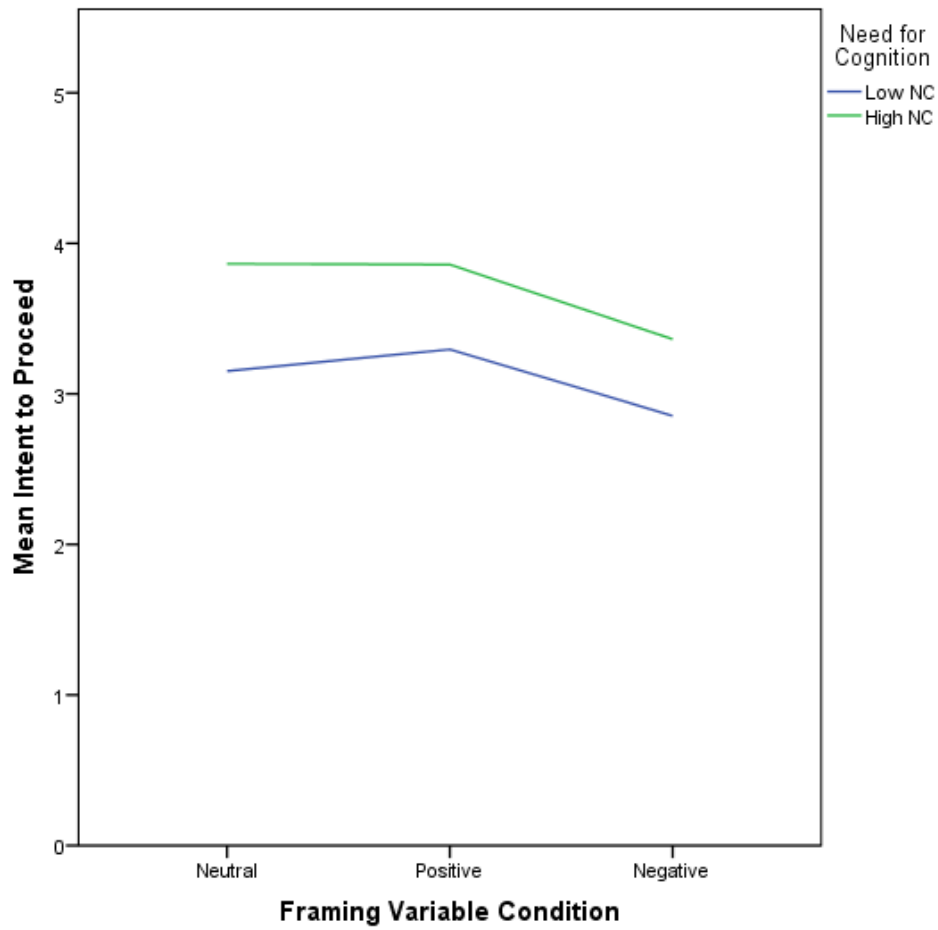
MANOVA Means with 95% Confidence Intervals

DEPENDENT VARIABLE	IV - FRAMING		IV - TIMING	
Intent to Proceed				
Neutral	3.552*	[3.344, 3.760]	Neutral	3.552 [3.344, 3.760]
Positive	3.585*	[3.443, 3.726]	Early	3.373 [3.229, 3.516]
Negative	3.169*	[3.024, 3.315]	Late	3.381 [3.238, 3.525]
Applicant Expectations				
Neutral	3.356*	[3.189, 3.524]	Neutral	3.356 [3.189, 3.524]
Positive	3.579*	[3.465, 3.693]	Early	3.309 [3.194, 3.424]
Negative	3.089*	[2.972, 3.206]	Late	3.360 [3.244, 3.475]
Informational Justice				
Neutral	2.848**	[2.668, 3.029]	Neutral	2.848 [2.668, 3.029]
Positive	2.896**	[2.774, 3.019]	Early	2.859 [2.735, 2.983]
Negative	2.711**	[2.585, 2.837]	Late	2.749 [2.624, 2.873]

Note. *Means are significant $p < .001$.

**Means are significant $p = .039$.

Figure 1.

MANCOVA Results for Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 4 also did not show significant results. Participants who were delivered the RJP in the early stage of the hiring process did not report a significant increase in perceived informational justice. This lack of a result was unexpected. It was presumed that receiving the RJP early in the hiring process would eliminate participant (applicant) feelings of being “cheated” or dragged through a majority of the hiring process only to be potentially surprised with RJP information. Regardless of the framing of the RJP message, the sheer timing of RJP delivery was expected to show a dramatic

difference in perceived fairness. Again, this result could be due to the scenario being completely imaginary.

Yet it could be argued that receiving the RJP message early in the hiring process influenced participant responses to the dependent measures. It is possible that participants felt the sense of being “cheated” and forced to reply differently by receiving the RJP *early* – particularly the positively framed message. This positively framed message, which highlights Metric’s high employee and client satisfaction levels, high employee retention rates, and positive job benefits could have been perceived as a type of bribe that was meant to persuade participants (applicants) to continue. The opposite could be said of the negatively framed condition; the *seemingly* low employee and client satisfaction levels, employee retention rates, and poor job benefits turned participants (applicants) off from continuing in the hiring process. Either possibility could have resulted in increased feelings of being treated unfairly.

Practical Implications

Organizations should positively frame their RJP messages to applicants in order to have a higher number of applicants moving forward in the hiring process. This does not mean that organizations should falsely inflate their RJP, as the point of a RJP is to remain realistic. This realism softens the blow from shock an applicant may feel starting in his/her new position with an organization. In other words, if job applicants enter a new job with realistic expectations of the company, workload, interactions with others, and general views into employee morale, it is likely the new employee(s) will not be sent into a shock as would have been the case if expectations were unrealistically high.

Additionally, if organizations complete the main objective of RJPs and do present realistic information, the public will catch wind of their company's image. Company image not only derives from current employees about their satisfaction with the organization and their position, but also from recruiting efforts the organization utilizes. Job advertisements are extremely important to organizations for a number of reasons including attracting qualified applicants for each open position, and building the public's opinion of them. Successful organizations should realize that company image is a very important factor in obtaining a customer base, as well as maintaining a large list of returning customers.

Limitations of the Current Research

The greatest limitation in this study was the use of an imaginary scenario. Participants were asked to imagine themselves in a hiring situation for a fictional job that may or may not have interested them. Additionally, the use of the fictional company, Metric, potentially confused participants or decreased their interest in the hiring process. Because participants were potentially asked to *imagine* they received the RJP information late in the hiring process (i.e., after several selection hurdles), participants' "real" time, effort, and commitment to the hiring process were minimal, if not non-existent. The researcher believed that participant compensation would instill participants with motivation to take their time with the survey, however it is possible the compensation rate was not high enough to accomplish this objective.

As with any online survey, the environment the participant completed the survey in was not able to be monitored or controlled by the researcher. A participant could have

encountered a multitude of distractions from others, been interrupted by a phone call or knock at the door, or put forth minimal effort into survey completion for any other reason. The researcher had no control over these potential distractions, nor any physical interaction with participants. This lack of control could have resulted in decreased internal validity in responses (as seen by the manipulation check results), however alpha levels are acceptable in this study.

Further, all information and data submitted by participants were self-reports. Self-report data have a plethora of disadvantages, perhaps the most prevalent is social desirability. Participants have the opportunity to commit confirmation bias – that is confirm in action what s/he believes about him/herself. For example, a participant might think s/he has a high need for cognition, thus would make a great analyst. It could be assumed that applicants with high need for cognition would desire a position that requires critical thinking, introspection, and troubleshooting – like a consultant.

Future Research

One possible direction for a continuation of this research would be the use of a real, well-known company and job opening with that company. This could remedy the biggest limitation of the current research and possibly result in stronger means. Another possible edit to the study design would be to implement two companies. If participants know they have at least two options for equivalent jobs, the timing manipulation becomes much more relevant. If the framing conditions are held constant and job descriptions are equivalent in both companies each participant sees, but Company X delivers the RJP early while Company Y delivers it late in the hiring process, this blatant manipulation

will be the only variable that influences participant responses. Even though both of these suggestions for future research still require a participant to imagine they are applying to a position, utilizing real, well-known companies lessens the extent of the imagined scenario.

Since the current research was aimed at the attitudes and beliefs of active job seekers, another possibility to build on the current study would be the use of clients of an employment agency. It was presumed that participants in the current study are actively looking for a career, based on their year in college. However, it is possible that students take time off after graduation before working for a variety of reasons. Utilizing the cooperation of an employment agency's clients as participants confirms the fact they are actively looking for a job. These confirmed active job seekers may or may not respond differently from the sample in the current research and should be examined to see any possible differences.

The current research was designed primarily around Tversky and Kahneman's work from the 1980's, as well as Buda and Charnov's work from 2003. More specifically, RJP content (i.e., employee and client satisfaction, retention rate, and insurance benefits) were designed based on Buda and Charnov's research, while common numbers from Prospect Theory stemmed from Tversky and Kahneman's research. However, the realistic sense of the RJP could also be further tested in future research. By wildly exaggerating the content and percentages of each piece of RJP information (e.g., 100% of our employees are completely satisfied with *all* aspects of their job, *all* the time)

and then comparing that to realistic RJP information, the exaggerated information could be shown to have a stronger influence on the framing and timing variables.

Focusing on the timing variable of this study, another limitation could stem from the incomplete information given to participants. Participants were given RJP information that revolved around receiving the information “immediately after submitting your application” or “after several selection hurdles. Both options are terse and fail to provide the big picture to participants in the study. This could easily be solved in future research by adding in more timing information into the RJP. For example, telling participants:

“By [specified date], all completed applications must be turned into Metric. In the week after this date, Metric’s Human Resources department will review all applications and selected applicants will receive RJP information (in the “early” condition). Two weeks after this date, interviews will be scheduled and conducted during weeks three and four after this date. Selected applicants will be given RJP information after the interview process has been completed (in the “late” condition).

The researcher could further expand on this information should they so choose.

The main point being the timing variable can take many different avenues and present more information to participants. It is also possible that by giving more information on timing, informational justice will have significant results as well.

Basic changes to this study’s procedures are also options for future research. As described above, it was possible that participant compensation rates were low or appeared

low to participants. Simply increasing compensation could motivate participants to further apply themselves while responding to the survey. Targeting specific students or colleges to the job position used in the survey could drastically alter results. For example, a “consultant” position could be targeted to business or marketing students; a “computer technician” position could target information technology (IT) students. By targeting what job position is sent to specific industries, participants could be more interested and motivated in the study. Targeting participants also allows participants to apply their expertise and provide more realistic data about applicant expectations in particular.

Summary

This study examined the effects of RJP message framing and timing of RJP delivery to participants. Intent to proceed in the hiring process, applicant expectations of the job and organization, and perceived informational justice of the hiring process were measured. Participants’ need for cognition data were also collected. Framing was shown to have an effect, however timing did not. Need for cognition was also a significant moderator. In conclusion, this study supports that organizations must positively frame their RJP in order to experience the highest number of applicant’s moving forward in the hiring process. However, organizations must stay true to the title of RJP and convey realistic information to the applicant to lessen the shock s/he feels entering his/her new job.

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Appendix A

Job Description

In this study, imagine you are a job applicant to a growing company, Metric, that offers consulting services to organizations and small businesses. Metric is hiring a Consultant. Metric has released the following job description for the position.



As a Consultant, some of your most common job tasks will include:

- Gather and organize information on problems or procedures
- Perform organization system analyses
- Document findings of analysis and approve recommendations for implementation
- Prepare manuals and train workers

Appendix B

Positively Framed, “Early” RJP

Immediately after submitting your application, Metric provided you with the following information sheet.



Thank you for your interest in Metric. We strive to inform all of our applicants with general information about our company. Our Human Resources department will contact you if you are selected or when the position has been filled.

Results from our annual employee opinion surveys show that 85% of our employees are satisfied with their job, and our customer service survey results show that 90% of our clients are satisfied.

In addition, during the last 5 years, we have had an 80% employee retention rate. We believe this is partially due to one of many employee benefits including 80% of health insurance premiums being paid by Metric.

Current Metric employees also enjoy environmentally controlled office settings, team-based work, challenging timelines, a structured work design, and standard working hours.

Appendix C

Negatively Framed, “late” RJP

After completing several steps in the recruitment process, but before receiving a job offer, Metric provided you with the following information sheet.



Thank you for your interest in Metric. We strive to inform all of our applicants with general information about the position they applied for. Our Human Resources department will contact you if you are selected or when the position has been filled.

Results from our annual employee opinion surveys show that 15% of employees are dissatisfied with their job, and customer service survey results show that 10% of our clients are dissatisfied.

In addition, during the last 5 years, we've had a 20% employee turnover rate. We believe this is partially due to one of many employee benefits including 20% of health insurance premiums being paid by employees.

Current Metric employees also enjoy environmentally controlled office settings, team-based work, challenging timelines, a structured work design, and standard working hours.

Appendix D

“Control” condition

Imagine that after you have submitted your application for the Consultant position. You receive the e-mail below from Metric:



Thank you for your interest in working at Metric. We would like to share all of our applicants with information about our company:

- Current Metric employees enjoy environmentally controlled office settings, team-based work, challenging timelines, a structured work design, and standard working hours.

Our Human Resources department will contact you if you are selected or when the position has been filled.